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Message Text

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AMEMBASSY JIDDA
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 037088

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, PGOV, LE, XF

SUBJECT: LEBANON AND PALESTINIANS

1. LEBANESE AMBASSADOR KABBANI, ON INSTRUCTIONS, CALLED ON ATHERTON ON FEB. 10 TO DELIVER COPIES OF SARKIS'S JANUARY ADDRESS TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS AND TO UNDERLINE THE IMPORTANCE LEBANON ATTACHED TO A RESOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM ALONG THE LINES REFLECTED IN THAT ADDRESS (I.E., LEBANON WILL NOT ACCEPT A SETTLEMENT
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ALLOWING THE PALESTINIANS TO STAY IN LEBANON). KABBANI SAID THAT THERE WOULD BE NO STABILITY IN LEBANON IF THE 400,000 OR MORE PALESTINIANS NOW IN THE COUNTRY WERE NOT GIVEN THE "RIGHT OF RETURN" PERMITTING THEM TO RESETTLE ELSEWHERE, WITHIN A COMPREHENSIVE MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT. THE LEBANESE, HE CONTINUED, WERE ESPECIALLY

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CONCERNED ABOUT THE ISRAELI ARGUMENT THAT THE PALESTINIANS SHOULD REMAIN WHERE THEY ARE NOW, AND HOPED THE U.S. WOULD NOT SUPPORT THAT POSITION.

2. ATHERTON ASKED FOR THE PRESENT ARAB DEFINITION OF THE "RIGHT TO RETURN." HE NOTED THAT AT ONE TIME THE ARAB STATES HAD ARGUED THIS MEANT THE RIGHT TO RETURN LITERALLY TO THE VERY HOMES THEY HAD LIVED IN, WHICH ARE NOW IN ISRAEL PROPER. HOW DID THE PROSPECT OF A PALESTINIAN HOMELAND ELSEWHERE, IN THE WEST BANK AND GAZA, AFFECT THE WORKING DEFINITION OF THE RIGHT TO RETURN? HE NOTED THAT THE GREAT MASS OF THE REFUGEES, AND PARTICULARLY THOSE NOW IN LEBANON, ORIGINALLY CAME FROM WHAT IS NOW ISRAEL PROPER. KABBANI SAID IT WAS WIDELY RECOGNIZED THAT THE ISRAELIS WOULD NOT TAKE THE PALESTINIANS BACK INTO ISRAEL PROPER. IT WAS, THEREFORE, WIDELY EXPECTED THAT RETURNING PALESTINIANS WOULD RE-SETTLE IN THEIR NEW HOMELAND.

3. ATHERTON ASSURED KABBANI THAT THE U.S. IN PEACE EFFORTS INTENDED TO DEAL WITH THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE IN ALL ITS ASPECTS, INCLUDING THE REFUGEE DIMENSION, BUT DID NOT HAVE FIRM ANSWERS TO THE COMPLICATED PROBLEM OF THE PALESTINIAN DIASPORA. WE RECOGNIZED THE PARTICULAR PROBLEM IN LEBANON AND WOULD KEEP AN OPEN MIND ON WAYS OF HANDLING IT. IT SEEMED TO US THAT A SOLUTION WOULD REQUIRE UNITED EFFORTS BY MANY STATES,
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INCLUDING THOSE WHICH HAD REGULARLY SUPPORTED UNRWA. LARGE SUMS OF MONEY WOULD ALSO BE REQUIRED.

4. KABBANI SAID IT WAS VITAL THAT THE PRINCIPLES OF PEACE INCLUDE SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE PALESTINIANS. THIS WILL CONTRIBUTE TO THE RESOLUTION OF THE REFUGEE PROBLEM, BUT SELF-RULE, AS PROPOSED BY BEGIN, WOULD CONTRIBUTE NOTHING. UNDER THE SELF-RULE PLAN, THE ISRAELIS WOULD BE ABLE TO IMPOSE CONDITIONS PREVENTING THE RETURN OF REFUGEES TO THE WEST BANK AND GAZA. IDEALLY, THERE SHOULD BE AN INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE, FORMED THROUGH AN EXERCISE IN SELF-DETERMINATION, WHICH WOULD BE ABLE TO DEAL WITH OTHER STATES AS REGARDS THE ADMISSION AND RESETTLEMENT OF THE REFUGEES.

5. CURRENT FIGHTING IN BEIRUT WAS DISCUSSED BRIEFLY. ATHERTON SAID WE RECOGNIZED THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE FIGHTING, THAT WE HAD INSTRUCTED AMBASSADORS PARKER AND MURPHY TO DO WHAT THEY COULD TO COOL TEMPERS AND TO MOVE THE PARTIES TO A RESOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM. KABBANI SHOWED CONCERN OVER PRESS REPORTS THAT ASSAD HAD SAID THE

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LEBANESE ARMY SHOULD BE DISBANDED AND THAT THE SYRIAN ARMY WAS LEBANON'S ARMY. ATHERTON EXPRESSED DOUBTS THAT THESE REPORTS, ORIGINALLY FROM A PRO-LIBYAN NEWS-PAPER, WERE ACCURATE. HE SAID ASSAD HAD SUPPORTED THE CONCEPT OF REBUILDING THE LEBANESE ARMY. AS FOR THE BEIRUT FIGHTING, IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT BOTH THE LEBANESE AND SYRIAN GOVERNMENTS GOT THEIR ORDERS TO CALM THE SITUATION DOWN THE LINE TO THE RANK-AND-FILE.

6. TURNING TO GENERAL PEACE-MAKING EFFORTS IN THE AREA AND ATHERTON'S FORTHCOMING MISSION, KABBANI VOICED HIS PERSONAL VIEW THAT THE SYRIAN ATTITUDES REMAINED HIGHLY IMPORTANT, AND WERE PERHAPS THE KEY TO PROGRESS. ASSAD WAS DISTRESSED AND CONCERNED OVER THE SADAT INITIA-
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TIVE. KABBANI SUGGESTED THAT THE U.S. SHOULD EXPAND ITS DIALOGUE WITH DAMASCUS AND TRY TO DEVELOP A MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDE ON THE PART OF ASSAD BOTH TOWARDS GENERAL PEACE NEGOTIATIONS AND THE SITUATION IN LEBANON. ATHERTON REPLIED THAT WE HAD REGULARLY DONE SO, BUT THAT ASSAD BASICALLY DID NOT TRUST SADAT AND BELIEVED THAT THE EGYPTIANS WERE WORKING TOWARD A BILATERAL AGREEMENT. ATHERTON STATED OUR BELIEF THAT SADAT DOES INDEED WANT A COMPREHENSIVE AGREEMENT AND WANTS THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES TO BE BROAD ENOUGH TO BRING IN THE REST OF THE PARTIES. KABBANI INDICATED THAT THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT ATTACHED A GREAT DEAL OF IMPORTANCE TO THE DECLARATION. ATHERTON SAID THAT THE USG WAS EQUALLY COMMITTED.

7. KABBANI ASKED THAT THE U.S. THINK OF LEBANON AS THE KEY TO THE PROCESS. THE PROBLEMS OF THE PALESTINIANS AND THE PROBLEMS OF LEBANON COULD BE SOLVED TOGETHER.
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